

Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

Fahrenheit 451

Ray Bradbury

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FAHRENHEIT 451

by
Ray Bradbury

Teacher Guide

Written by
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Note

The 2012 Simon & Schuster paperback edition of the novel, © 1953 by Ray Bradbury, was used to prepare this guide. The page references may differ in other editions. Novel ISBN: 978-1-4516-7331-9

Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this novel for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Literary Elements

Character analysis, figurative language, conflict/resolution, plot development, genre, theme, style, point of view

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, debate, dramatic reenactment

Writing

Essay, poetry, report, dialogue, short response

Critical Thinking

Identifying attributes, research, compare/contrast, brainstorming, problem-solving, creative thinking, inferences, predicting

Comprehension

Summarizing, cause/effect, sequencing

Vocabulary

Prefixes/suffixes, definitions, application, glossary

Across the Curriculum

History—book-burning, censorship, mass media production, 1950s/1960s youth culture, Oxford Martyrs, “atomic age”; Health—antisocial behavior; Current Events—news coverage; Art—portrait, abstracts, panels, chalk/charcoal drawing, ink drawing, “quote collage,” storyboard; Literature—abridgements, classic literature and poetry; Drama—casting; Music—soundtrack

Supplementary Activities

1. Look up the clinical definition of the term “antisocial.” Discuss whether this term accurately describes Clarisse.
2. Research and discuss the rise of youth culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Compare it to Clarisse’s description of people her age on pages 26–27 of the novel.
3. Use context clues and prefix/suffix analysis to “decode” the following words Bradbury uses in the novel: ear-thimble, contrasedative, dis-ease.
4. Complete the Metaphors and Similes chart on page 26 of this guide.

Pages 29–66

Montag begins to question the history and purpose of his occupation. On a routine fire call, Montag is disturbed to witness a woman set fire to her own home rather than watch the firemen remove or burn her precious books. The next day, Montag does not go to work and Captain Beatty visits him at home. While Beatty is there, Mildred discovers a book behind Montag’s pillow but does not read it. After Beatty leaves, Montag reveals his stash of books to Mildred and forces her to read some of them with him.

Vocabulary

roll back
luminesce
digest
resume
centrifuge
pratfall
sauterne
nomadic
cartographers
dictum
breach
memoriams
bestial
tactile

Discussion Questions

1. How does Montag sit in the firehouse? How can the reader tell his perception of his world has changed since he was first introduced in the novel? (Montag actually notices things around him, like the “pale-woman faces of his colleagues. He also notices that they all have similar appearances, with “charcoal hair and spot-colored brows and bluish-ash-smear’d cheeks where they had haven’t lost [p. 10]. He wonders about the part a “task Clarisse’s question: “Didn’t firemen power their stoves, their stoves stoke them up and get them going” [p. 31]? Consider she’d note that the “history” of firefighting on page 32 of the novel is totally false, as Benjamin Franklin founded the first fire company [which put out fires in Boston in 1730. Montag once unquestioningly accepted everything he was told but now he has learned to wonder.)

2. How does the woman with the matches flee Montag? (Montag she enters his way into the house, since he is accustomed to the books already being gone when he arrives. Montag initially feels irritation rather than pity because he feels the woman is “spoiling the ritual” [p. 34], and all the firemen react to her “accusing” by joking loudly. However, soon Montag begins to view her books as living things, such as birds and fish, as they fall in flames around him. He describes the woman standing before the firemen “like a small girl, among the bodies” [p. 34]. As the firemen prepare to burn the house itself, only Montag tries to lead the woman to safety. He is shocked when she lights the fire herself. Later, when Montag tries to tell Mildred about the event, he links the woman’s death to the value of her books: “There must be something in books, things we can’t imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house...You don’t stay for nothing” [p. 48].)

3. How does Montag react to the woman with the matches? (Montag initially feels irritation rather than pity because he feels the woman is “spoiling the ritual” [p. 34], and all the firemen react to her “accusing” by joking loudly. However, soon Montag begins to view her books as living things, such as birds and fish, as they fall in flames around him. He describes the woman standing before the firemen “like a small girl, among the bodies” [p. 34]. As the firemen prepare to burn the house itself, only Montag tries to lead the woman to safety. He is shocked when she lights the fire herself. Later, when Montag tries to tell Mildred about the event, he links the woman’s death to the value of her books: “There must be something in books, things we can’t imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house...You don’t stay for nothing” [p. 48].)

9. Why do you think Montag chooses this time to reveal his hidden books to Mildred? (*Answers will vary. Aside from the fact that Mildred just discovered the book Montag hid behind his pillow, Montag's frame of mind seems to have changed by this time. Despite Captain Beatty's lecture, Montag refuses to return to his previous way of thinking. He thinks of Clarisse, which may indicate her ideas have superseded Beatty's in his mind. He feels impassioned against what Beatty said and feels he needs to somehow save his relationship with Mildred, saying: "We've got to start somewhere here, figuring out why we're in such a mess, you and the medicine nights, and the car, and me and my work. We're heading right for the cliff, Millie. God, I don't want to go over" [pp. 63–64]. Sharing his secret with Mildred and reading the books together is Montag's last-ditch effort to revive and revamp his life.*)

Supplementary Activities

- Using the description on page 3 of the novel, sketch a portrait of one of Montag's typical fellow firemen.
- Research the Oxford Martyrs, including their connection to the line uttered by the woman in the novel who burns with her books: "Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out" (p. 33).
- In one or two paragraphs, explain Clarisse's theory about why architects did away with front porches on the houses that built.

Part Two: *Save and the Sand*

Pages 67–88

As Montag struggles to make sense of what he reads in the books he stashed, he and Mildred hear the Mechanical Hound outside their front door. Montag recalls an encounter he had with a retired English professor named Faber. He decides Faber is the only person who can help him and takes a Bible to show the man (and to possibly have a copy made) for a long conversation with Faber, the professor agrees to help Montag. Faber gives Montag an apparatus that will allow them to stay in constant communication while they execute their plan.

Discussion Questions

- What did Montag expect to happen after he read from a few books, and why is he disappointed when he does begin reading? (*Montag expected that the books would offer the key to a richer, fuller, more meaningful life. However, even after rereading some pages several times, he cannot make sense of what he is reading. Montag admits to himself, "For Montag, it's mud to you, too" [p. 70]. He has no concept of intellectual enrichment because he has never experienced those things in his noisy, fast, unfeeling, instant-gratification society. He realizes he lacks the skills to comprehend what he is reading and asks, "...where do you find a teacher this late" [p. 70]? It is clear that Montag still has a long way to go on his path to enlightenment.*)
- What does Montag mean when he says to Mildred, "Maybe the books can get us half out of the cave. They just *might* stop us from making the same...insane mistakes" (p. 70)? (*Montag wants to drastically change his and Mildred's way of life, which would remove them from the metaphorical "darkness" in which they have been living their entire lives. Montag also seems to feel that his society never learns from its mistakes, but rather uses brute force [via the military] and luxuries [via lighthearted, inane entertainment] to perpetuate a cyclical, meaningless way of life.*)

Understanding Values

Values represent people's beliefs about what is important, good, or worthwhile. For example, most families value spending time together.

Directions: Think about the following characters from the novel and the values they exhibit. What do they value? What beliefs do they have about what is important, good, or worthwhile? On the chart below, list each character's three most important values from most important to least. Be prepared to share your lists during a class discussion.

Montag

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Mildred

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Clarisse

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Values

Beatty

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Faber

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Granger

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

After you have finished the chart and participated in the class discussion, think about which character seems to have values most like your own. Write a paragraph that explains why you chose this character.